

INTRODUCTION

Serves as a Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) for Animal Care with geographic responsibility for the compliance and enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act, within the assigned counties and/or states. Assignments involve (a) planning, coordinating, adapting, and modifying medical and program procedures to deal with animals covered under the Acts; (b) developing and recommending new procedures and practices for properly and efficiently enforcing the Acts; and (c) inspecting dealers, exhibitors and research facilities and examining animals to assure full compliance with the Acts.

DUTIES

The incumbent has overall responsibility for the scheduling and accomplishment of all pre licensing inspections, routine periodic inspections, deficiency follow-up inspections, and special investigations needed in response to leads received on possible violations. Many inspections are accomplished with the assistance of one or more Animal Health Technicians (AHT). However, the VMO personally performs the most complex and sensitive inspections and performs necessary spot checks to assure the adequacy of inspections performed by the technicians.

Inspected facilities include animal dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities who have applied for a license under the Animal Welfare Act in addition to those currently licensed. The VMO provides a broad professional assessment of the overall treatment of animals at these inspected facilities, consistent with the spirit of the Animal Welfare Act.

Due to legal constraints (under the Animal Welfare Act, the AHT is not allowed to document veterinary deficiencies), professional requirements, and the high visibility and extreme sensitivity involved, research facilities are inspected only by the VMO. The VMO has knowledge in the areas of anatomy, physiology, microbiology, parasitology, pathology, internal medicine, pharmacology, etc. necessary to conduct a thorough examination of the animals involved. In addition, the Animal Welfare Act requires that any licensed or registered facility have an attending veterinarian and a complete program of veterinary care. It is the VMO who is responsible for evaluating the qualifications of such professionals to assure that they have the experience to deal with the management and care of animals located in their facility, for evaluating the program to ensure it meets all requirements of the Act, and for interacting with the facilities' professional staffs (scientists, researchers, and institution officials).

The activities that occur in the research facility are under enormous scrutiny by the general public. The VMO is responsible for constantly reviewing the research protocols and, most importantly, addressing the issue of the pain and suffering that these animals must endure. The VMO must evaluate the extent of such suffering, and explore the need for it in relation to the successful accomplishment of the research. The VMO is responsible for assuring that unnecessary pain and distress is prevented by the proper use of anesthetics, analgesics, tranquilizers, and euthanasia.

In all types of facilities covered under the Animal Welfare Act, the VMO is responsible for conducting a thorough review of such factors as: structural strength, water and electric, storage of food and bedding, waste disposal, heating and temperature, ventilation, lighting, drainage, interior surfaces, shelter, space requirements, feeding, watering, sanitation, cleaning, housekeeping, pest control, veterinary care, handling of animals, transportation, and record keeping. The incumbent works with assigned establishments/organizations to attain their voluntary compliance with the Act, constantly reviewing conditions and reminding facility officials of their authority and responsibilities.

Incumbent is responsible for enforcing the Horse Protection Act, following uniform procedures when inspecting horse shows, exhibitions, sales, and auctions. (By law, only the VMO can perform these activities - not an AHT). Incumbent is responsible for contacting officials of horse shows, exhibitions, etc. to ensure they understand the law and regulations, and responsibilities of the designated official show veterinarian. Incumbent advises management on all areas of the show (adequate facilities, crowd control, handling of horses, etc.).

The incumbent is expected to continuously evaluate the Animal Care and Horse Protection programs to determine their effectiveness, and advise management, in the form of veterinary medical or program procedural modifications, to correct persistent problem areas.

Incumbent is relied upon to serve as a liaison between the Agency and the general public. He/she represents the Agency at meetings of industry and other concerned public and private groups and individuals to promote the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection programs. The VMO serves as the link that can identify areas where policies are not understood by affected groups and calls these to the attention of the Sector Supervisor.

The VMO responds to leads or information obtained from newspaper articles, conversations, etc., or requests by other States, Regional Directors, or Staff, searching for unlicensed dealers, exhibitors, operators of auction sales, unregistered research facilities, carriers, intermediate handlers, laboratories, etc., to determine their status under the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts.

Incumbent participates in seminars, symposiums, informational and recruiting activities; provides accurate and complete explanations of programs and policies or directs requester to the proper source of information, provides training to individuals and/or groups on the Animal Welfare programs and inspection procedures.

The VMO may supervise Animal Health Technicians and/or lower graded Veterinary Medical Officers assigned to their section. This includes planning and organizing work, assigning duties, approving leave, training employees, evaluating performance, resolving complaints and grievances, initiating disciplinary actions, and other similar functions.

In addition to the above duties, the VMO may be called upon to assist Veterinary Services. Typical activities would include the following:

- serve on an emergency disease eradication task force which has responsibility for instituting immediate quarantines, diagnostic controls, and eradication measures to effectively localize the epidemic.
- analyze veterinary medical and technical data from field investigations, laboratory tests, and pathological examinations of existing or potential disease epidemic problems.
- apply recognized diagnostic procedures in diagnosing a variety of domestic and foreign animal and poultry diseases, especially those of significant economic importance that Agency policy has determined necessary to prevent, control or eradicate.
- perform duties related to enforcement of veterinary biologics regulations within assigned section; inspect livestock markets, trucks, and other vehicles, and abattoirs primarily for the effectiveness of disease prevention and control procedures, and to ensure program requirements are met.

Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position

Professional knowledge of the veterinary medical arts and sciences in general, plus additional knowledge of the veterinary arts and sciences as they relate to animals protected under the Animal Welfare Act. This includes the humane handling, husbandry, care, maintenance, transportation, housing, and showing of animals used for purposes of research, exhibition, or as pets.

Knowledge of veterinary arts and sciences as they pertain to the Horse Protection Act, the physical examination of horses for soreness, differential diagnosis of lameness, and observation of sore "way of going."

Knowledge of humane laws and attitudes and knowledge of the operations and problems of research facilities, exhibitors, pet suppliers, and animal transporters.

Ability to apply standard veterinary medical and program practices, procedures, and techniques during the review and evaluation of Animal Care and Horse Protection activities.

Factor 2- Supervisory Controls

The Sector Supervisor assigns geographic responsibility and final program authority for the full range of Animal Care activities within counties and/or states. The VMO consults with the supervisor to establish geographic veterinary medical and program objectives, policies, and work outlines, especially those with significant interest to the public. The VMO independently plans own work, coordinates adjusted or modified veterinary medical and program procedures among other professionals and officials, resolves potential Animal Welfare issues, and carries out assignments to completion. Assignment results, in the form of veterinary medical and program judgments or recommendations, are usually accepted as technically sound. The results, however, are reviewed for conformance with the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts and Agency policy, budget and related program goals.

Factor 3 - Guidelines

Guidelines consist of the Animal Welfare Act, Horse Protection Act, program directives, and State and Federal laws, regulations, policies and memoranda governing the humane care, housing, handling, and transportation of animals and anti-soring of horses. The VMO independently selects, adapts, and applies veterinary medical and program guidelines with initiative and judgment to achieve ultimate success in the compliance and enforcement of the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts. The VMO may be required to exercise ingenuity and resourcefulness to deviate from or extend traditional veterinary medical methods or practices in dealing with significant cases where guidelines are too general or completely inapplicable. Judgment is exercised by the VMO in developing and recommending new veterinary medical and program guidelines; reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of Animal Care systems and procedures; and promoting all aspects of the animal welfare programs.

Factor 4 - Complexity

Assignments involve a wide range of inspection activities necessary to enforce broad and comprehensive provisions of the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts. The type of facilities inspected and range of violation problems encountered are highly varied. The work performed is often complicated by a lack of cooperation, and often outright deception and/or hostility, on the part of personnel at the inspected facilities. Evaluations of research protocols are particularly difficult, requiring an exceptional degree of judgment in evaluating the extent and propriety of pain and suffering of laboratory animals.

Inspection activities involve a variety of domestic, wild, and exotic animals, ranging from rodents to carnivores, elephants, and marine mammals. The VMO must have a working knowledge of the anatomy, physiology, psychology, social, behavioral, and nutritional requirements of these animals and how they are affected by the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts. The VMO must be able to recognize normal and abnormal situations, characteristics, and behaviors in these animals.

He/she must be aware of diseases and parasite conditions affecting the various types of animals and of acceptable and non acceptable training and handling practices.

Factor 5 - Scope and Effect

The purpose of this position is to ensure the humane care, handling, and transportation of animals covered by the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts. The VMO often deals with unique situations and cooperates with other Federal agencies and groups involving situations that are delicate or controversial in nature. The standards and regulations have an enormous impact upon profit and nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and local, State and Federal agencies, who have responsibility for enforcing legislation that may overlap in some of the same areas. In addition, the Animal Care Program experiences extremely high visibility with humane groups and the general public, and there is great potential for embarrassment to the Government. The VMO must continually balance his/her responsibilities to the Agency with the necessity of maintaining a good working relationship with the facilities he comes in contact with.

Factor 6 - Personal Contacts

Personal contacts are with Staff officials and professionals of Federal, State, and local government agencies, members of humane groups, professional experts in the regulated industry field (zoos, marine mammals, etc.), and all segments of the establishments regulated by the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts (dealers, exhibitors, research facilities, etc.).

Factor 7 - Purpose of Contacts

The purpose of the contacts is to conduct inspections at establishments covered under the Acts and explain, clarify, and promote the humane care, handling, and transportation of animals. The VMO provides or obtains veterinary medical and program information concerning the effectiveness of the Animal Care program throughout his/her assigned counties and/or states. He/she is also responsible for influencing, motivating, and gaining the cooperation of individuals and/or groups, to comply with existing regulations and standards.

Exceptional tact and diplomacy are required to deal with individuals who view the veterinarian as an adversary. Lack of cooperation from owners and employees of inspected facilities is common. Instances of outright hostility occur with considerable frequency. Dealings with animal rights groups are sometimes volatile.

Factor 8 - Physical Demands

The work involves inspections of facilities of dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities as well as inspecting horses at horse shows requiring considerable movement. Physical effort is required in handling horses and cautious movement in and around animal pens and cages to defend against physical attack by large and/or confused animals.

Factor 9 - WORK ENVIRONMENT

There is exposure to contagious, infectious, or communicable diseases while working around animals covered by the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts. This includes physical examination of horses at horse shows and working with highly distressed exotic animals at exhibitor facilities. The work requires some special clothing and gear including rubber boots, long medical coats, sanitized garments, gloves, masks, gowns, and so forth.